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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, November 10, 1931

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "What Grows in Sunny South Window." Information from W. R. Beattie, Office of Horticulture, United States Department of Agriculture.

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I dropped in to W. R. B's kitchen the other evenings, to ask his wife for a recipe. W. R. B. was working on something in the dining room -- hammering and sawing and making a lot of noise.

"What's it all about?" I asked, as soon as there was a lull, in the pounding.

"I'm building a stand, for the plants we keep in our sunny south window, during the winter," said my friend. "You see, plants won't do well, unless they have the most favorable conditions in the house. It's difficult to get many blossoms in the winter, unless conditions are just right. Plants seem to have personalities, and need to be humored."

"Do you mean to say that even plants are temperamental?" I asked.

"Something like that," he answered. "For example, take the matter of sunlight. Most people have an idea that a Maidenhair fern wants to be kept in the shade, all the time. As a matter of fact, nothing could make a Maidenhair more despondent, than to be kept in the shade, everlastingly. It wants sunlight, at least four or five hours a day -- even longer will do no harm. And a Maidenhair fern does not like to be crowded by other plants.

"See that little palm? It has quite different notions about sunlight. The palm wants some sunlight, but to expose it directly to the hot sun, for too long a time, will make its leaves blister, and make it turn yellow -- and first thing you know you'll have a very sick palm."

"What is that large fern?" I asked. "Is it a Boston fern?"

"Yes," replied W. R. B. "We use that large fern as a centerpiece for our window. It will be placed well back from the window, so that the smaller plants can have room near the light. You see that fern is really the most important place in our collection, and it occupies considerable space."

"What about geraniums?" I asked. "Do they need sunlight?"

"All the sunlight they can get," said W. R. B. "Geraniums are a little peculiar, however, in their moisture requirements. Nothing discourages a geranium more than overdoing the watering.

"Ferns want a reasonable amount of water — just a little each day; not too much at any one time. House plants should never be given so much water that the excess stands in the saucers, under the pots. On the other hand, if the room is kept fairly warm, and the plants dry out rapidly, you must see that they are watered rather frequently."

"Who takes care of the plants in your sunny south window?" I asked. "Do you?"

"No," said W.R.B. "I build the table, and prepare the plants for the window, but Mrs. B. deserves all the credit for making them grow. I am a good deal like the man whose wife went away for a week's vacation, and cautioned her husband to water the plants, and feed the canary, every day while she was gone. When she came home, she found the plants wilted, and the canary almost starved. That's about the way I'd tend the plants, if they were left to me. However, it's different with the plants in the garden; I look them over every day. But I surely would forget the house plants; I'm perfectly willing to leave the care of the plants in the sunny south window to Mrs. B., Aunt Sammy."

"Of course," I said. "Isn't that just like a man? Always leaving the work inside the house for the women to do. Perhaps that's why 'man works from sun to sun, while woman's work is never done.' Think so?"

But W. R. B. seemed anxious to change the subject.

"Look at that fern over there," he said. "Last spring, when I repotted it, there was not much left, but a root. Now see what a fine specimen it is. And look at the blooming begonia. Do you know, that begonia blossomed all summer. If nothing happens, I think it is going to bloom right through the winter."

"Do you have any trouble with insects on house plants?" I asked.

"Yes, indeed," said he. "There are at least three kinds of insects that give us trouble on our houseplants. First, there's the little insect known as the 'Red Spider,' that gets on the underside of the geranium leaves. In fact, the Red Spider troubles a good many kinds of house plants. It is especially troublesome where the air is quite dry. There are several ways of controlling it. I simply take my plants out on the porch, when it is warm, and spray them thoroughly with cold water. This is the most practical method. Another insect that troubles some of our house plants is the little aphis, or plant louse, which sucks the juices of the plants, and kills them. Spraying the plants, especially the underside of the leaves, with an atomizer containing a solution of nicotine sulphate is quite effective. Use about 10 drops of the nicotine solution, to a cup of water.

"The most troublesome insects that we have to deal with, however,

little swab, made of a wad of cotton, on the end of a toothpick. It sometimes requires two or three scrubbings to rid the plants of the insects after they have once become established. Mealy bugs -- soft, white cushiony-looking insects -- are very troublesome on ferns, and several other kinds of plants. About the only way of getting rid of them, like the scale insects, is to wash them off, using a weak solution of fish oil soap, or dip the small cotton swab in rather dilute alcohol."

"What are those funny looking plants coming up in the pots?" I asked W. R. B. at this point.

"Those," said he, "are some narcissus bulbs that I brought into the house, thinking that we would have a few blossoms for Christmas. It is a little early to start them, but I thought I would make a trial."

"How about primroses?" I asked. "Wouldn't they be lovely, for Christmas blooms? I don't see any primroses in your sunny south window."

"No," said W. R. B. "Primroses are taboo in this house. If Mrs. B. goes near them, she will have a bad case of poisoning -- just like poison ivy."

As I told my friend, I had no idea that primroses are poisonous.

"They aren't, to some people, he told me, "but to others they are very poisonous. They don't affect me; I do not poison. Primroses are beautiful flowers, and I recommend them to persons who are not affected by them. Another beautiful house plant is the cyclamen, and it is harmless."

"How about fertilizer for house plants?" I asked.

"That's a good question," replied W. R. B., "and an important one. First, in preparing the potting soil in which the plants are grown, we usually see to it that a liberal quantity of well-rotted compost is mixed with the soil; also a little sand to give it good texture. In addition, about a teacupful of bone meal is mixed with each bushel of soil. About once or twice during the winter we give the plants in the sunny south window a watering with nitrate of soda, about a teaspoonful to a gallon of water. This gives them a vigorous growth and bright green foliage but be careful and don't make it too strong or you will kill the plants.

"You'll notice that some of the plants have turned their heads toward the window. It is perfectly natural for the plants to turn toward the light. It would be better if the light came from all sides, but that is impossible in this bay window. From time to time we turn the plants so that they will develop evenly. Any more questions, Aunt-Sammy?"

"Not this time, thank you. May I tell my radio friends that you'll answer their questions, about house plants, if they'll send the questions to me?"

"Certainly," said W. R. B., and he resumed his hammering and sawing, while his wife and I compared recipes, and new ideas in cooking.

Tomorrow: "The Baby's Room."

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TO PROGRAM MANAGERS:

Our file copies of the Housekeepers' Chat, for release Thursday, November 19, 1931, lack page 4. Thinking that perhaps your copy also failed to include page 4, I am sending inclosed this page for insertion in your copy if it is missing in the draft mailed to you.

Very truly yours,

Morse Salisbury

Morse Salisbury,
Chief of Radio Service.

(Inclosure)